

On My Mind
10/24/08

The *Saipan Tribune* got it wrong, this week. Its poll asks whether people will be wearing orange while federal officials are on island to assess the suitability of the waters surrounding CNMI's three northern-most islands as a candidate for monument declaration by President George W. Bush.

It is touted as an "opinion" poll, and I suppose one could argue that wearing orange expresses an opinion, and therefore opinions are being measured. But in reality, all that is being measured is the number of people who happen to own a piece of orange clothing, and who believe wearing orange signifies something, and who are free, interested in, and willing to wear something orange all week.

Is that really what the *Tribune* wanted to know?

A far more revealing question would have been whether those people fortunate enough to hear the Chairman of the President's Council on Environmental Quality, James Connaughton, speak during his visit think that he answered any of their questions, brought any new information, provided any assurances regarding the President's intent, regarding the impact on the CNMI of declaring those northern waters a marine monument.

Connaughton's performance was impressive. He was well-prepared (he was obviously familiar with the governor's letter of protest - and came prepared to offer solutions); he was articulate and unflappable (never losing his calm, always aware of, and respectful toward his audience); he was well-informed (about the Hawaii monument as well as what constituted the proposed CNMI monument, about the marine as well as geological attributes of the area), he was flexible and obliging (offering to stay as long as anyone wanted to speak at the legislative hearing); he was open and friendly to all to whom he spoke.

That's not surprising, given his experiences undergoing Congressional hearings, I was told, but to see it so close at hand was awesome. I also found it totally awesome that three such high-ranking officials from Washington - one from the White House itself together with an Assistant Secretary and a Deputy Assistant Secretary - would spend almost four full days in such a tiny place, with a population of what would hardly be more than a township anywhere else.

Connaughton brought a wealth of direct, first-hand information that had only been implied, hinted at, until now. Yes, he said, co-management of the monument could be written into the President's declaration - adding that that could also include co-management of the EEZ. He said both international and national law assure freedom of navigation in the waters under discussion. He explained that since manganese and cobalt nodules were only found in the more southern waters, not in the area of the proposed monument, there would be no conflict between mining the nodules, should that become feasible, and protecting the northern waters.

He clarified that while the northern island area could also be declared a sanctuary under the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration instead of a monument in a Presidential act, monument status provided far more flexibility, since co-management of the EEZ is not something NOAA is authorized to grant.

Moreover, achieving sanctuary status is a long, drawn-out process, involving conduct of a Public Scoping, determination of Issue Characterization, and Development of an Environmental Impact Statement and Management Plan (EIS/MP). It is, as a matter of fact, these requirements that took Hawaii so long - it had been in the process of establishing a marine sanctuary.....

He said that along with monument status would come a visitor's center and a boat - that they would be part of the package.

The CNMI is fortunate that declaration of Hawaii's monument came first. Much ground was broken there that works to the advantage of the CNMI. The idea of co-management of the monument originated with Hawaii, where there is now an unprecedented three-way agreement between the state of Hawaii, the U.S. Secretary of Commerce and the U.S. Secretary of the Interior. The idea of a separate committee to address indigenous concerns was forged in Hawaii. There will no doubt be other issues, approaches, strategies relevant to management and operation of Pacific marine monuments addressed in the Hawaii negotiations that will provide guidance of what to do - or not do - should a CNMI monument be declared.

Where the CNMI differs from all the other candidates is in the richness, the diversity, the uniqueness of both the marine and the geological features found there, due in considerable part to the presence of the Marianas Trench, and in part to the remoteness of the site.

Yet it would seem that far too few have yet to fully grasp the implications of this difference. The CNMI, in its back yard, so to speak, has a rare source of life, beauty, and knowledge the likes of which have not been found anywhere else in the world. Particularly at this time, when so many of the world's resources - on land and sea - are being depleted, it would seem obvious that such wealth should be viewed as a world-wide treasure, to be protected and preserved for the good of the whole world.

Aren't the local tradition and culture themselves built on the idea of sharing?

An unfortunately under-advertised forum turned out to be both energizing and inspiring: the Humanities Council's panel discussion last night at the PIC's Charley's Cabaret on "The X chromosome - gender quality in the CNMI." Six women shared thoughts, experiences in response to "Does gender still matter?" "Does a glass ceiling exist in the

CNMI?" "Does the local culture indoctrinate females into subordinate roles?" "Is there equity in the pay scale?"

Most outspoken and assertive was former Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety and now senior prosecutor in the CNMI Attorney General's office Rebecca Warfield, which in and of itself already speaks volumes. Most pithy of her comments: "Don't let gender determine your destiny." "Know your own worth," she stressed; if you do, "you can demand what you are worth." Deputy Secretary of Labor Cinta Kaipat cautioned women about the "oowe" factor - women, she said, were often "Our Own Worst Enemy." Senator Frisca Pangelinan described the rejection of the Senate budget by the House as couched in personal gender terms, rather than impersonal committee terms. Also on the panel were retired educator Laura I. Manglona, Tinian Ice and Water vice-president Kimberlyn King-Hinds, and Guam Legislative Speaker Judith T. Won Pat.

Not asked: "Do women operate, think, differently from men?" And the clear answer: "They sure do!" One had but to listen to the strategies, tactics, products, described by the women: particularly Warfield, whose achievements at DPS are legendary; Pangelinan, whose '09 budget committee report is a model of clarity and reasonableness; Won Pat, Guam's first female speaker; and House member Tina Sablan, albeit not included on the panel, whose industriousness, integrity and perseverance exemplify the ideal lawmaker.

Short takes:

Hallowe'en is one week away. If you'd like your children to "trick or treat" in a safe and friendly setting, American Memorial Park is again sponsoring "Trunk or Treat" in the parking lot. Conducted by the Park Rangers, the event offers a place for families to set up tables, or use truck beds, or even trunks, from which to dispense treats to children on Hallowe'en (Friday, October 31) from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. It's safe, fun and free, with the added attraction of a costume parade "around the world" (approximately 6:00 p.m.), a prize for the best decorated trunk, and a free showing of the horror movie "Frankenstein." More information is available from Rangers Nancy and Rheanna at 234-7207, extension 2020.

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Proof of House member Tina Sablan's commitment and dedication: the timely publication of both the Senate version of the '09 budget, and the accompanying carefully crafted committee report prepared by Senate Fiscal Affairs chairman Frisca Pangelinan, on Sablan's web site < <http://www.tinasablan.com/forum/> >.

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Today's papers had a wealth of thoughtful letters about the monument controversy: Ed Propst's, who proposes some civilized "rules of engagement," Mayor Juan B. Tudela's, who has expressed better than most the islanders' cultural connections to land and sea (only in the *Marianas Variety*); Jaime Vergara's wonderful satire (only in the *Trib*).